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ABSTRACT

Although outdoor leadership does not appear to be coalescing into a unified profession, there are potential solutions to this fragmentation. Six robust approaches to the professional provision of outdoor leadership are: (1) outfitting and guiding; (2) organized camping; (3) adventure education, such as Outward Bound; (4) the outdoor school; (5) facility-based adventure education, such as ropes courses; and (6) religious-oriented adventure programs. Impediments to professionalism include: variations in the hard skills required; disparity in program goals; lack of a common vision in outdoor recreation; failure of professional leaders to provide philosophical or theoretical underpinnings; and the relative success of each segment of the industry independently. Crystallization of a profession of outdoor leadership could result in improvements in its public image, standardization of liability insurance, and greater influence on public policy. Part of the solution to fragmentation is to allow America's universities to play a larger role in professional development than they are now playing in teaching, research, and service. Graduation from a bachelor degree track in outdoor leadership can come to represent the standard minimum competency level for entry-level professionals. (KS)

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THE FRAGMENTATION OF OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP

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By

David Cockrell

Editors' note: The following was presented as part of PANEL #3: NON-PROFITS AND SPECIAL POPULATIONS. A transcription of the question and answer period can be found in Appendix B.

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Whale-watching, natural history cruises, sea kayaking and mountain bike tours. Summit climbs to the highest mountain on all seven continents. Inn-To-Inn bicycling. Spectacular snorkeling. Beautiful country, fine old hotels, helicopters, sea kayaks, hot air balloons. Dog sled adventure--mush your own team. Dynamic mobile environmental education program lets you earn a graduate, undergraduate or high school degree. Comprehensive, year-round wilderness skills and leadership training. Relationship awareness training and rentals. Adrenaline rush of a lifetime! Jump from hot air balloons. Family trips and Ducky School!

What is becoming of outdoor adventure education? The above collage, composed from "The Active Traveller," October, 1990, *Outside* magazine, is a reconnaissance trip through the myriad of adventure opportunities provided by professionals in this field. Their services play on a broad range of human motivations: A yearning for upper class style among the upwardly mobile; a searching for identity through old cultural rituals; a reaching out for meaning in the deafening routine of middle class life.

But would the profit and non-profit agencies offering such adventure opportunities define themselves as outdoor adventure educators? I think most would not. At a National Conference for Outdoor Leaders, do the attendees mean the same thing when they speak of *outdoor leaders*? I think not. I would contend that outdoor leadership has moved *away from* coalescing into a unified profession in the last few years, and I believe it is from this context that we must examine training needs for entering professionals. In this brief discourse, I will lay out what I see as the current segments of the industry, the impediments to professionalization, and a potential solution.

Overview of a Fragmented Industry

As I see it, there are currently six robust approaches to the professional provision of outdoor leadership. The first is the outfitting and guiding industry. With a 150-year tradition in America (and a much longer one elsewhere), outfitters continue to provide access to wilderness adventure for a significant proportion of North Americans. The bread and butter of the industry has always been hunting and fishing, but with nearly four million guided whitewater trips in 1985 (Lime, 1986), river outfitting has reached a close second in

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economic importance. Steady growth in the adventure travel business in the 1980s has opened new doors to the traditional outfitted trip, from mountain bike descents of volcanoes in Hawaii to guided treks to the South Pole. Simply put, the typical mission of the outfitter and guide is to provide exciting but safe, new recreation experiences for clients without the expertise to participate alone.

A second outdoor leadership industry nearly as old as outfitting is organized camping. With 10,000 summer camps in the United States alone in 1982 serving nine million campers, the American Camping Association now boasts 7,000 members (Kraus and Scanlan, 1983). Camp programs now typically include ropes and initiative courses, whitewater activities, climbing, and wilderness trips as well as the traditional activity areas of crafts, sports and games, drama and, aquatics. Goals emphasize socialization, self-concept development, and lifetime leisure skills acquisition.

Since the 1960s, the Outward Bound movement in North America has developed its own strong traditions and clientele groups. The central tendency of this approach to outdoor programming is the provision of contrived stress, often in a wilderness environment, as a vehicle for producing personal growth. The Outward Bound model for *adventure education* has broad application, and indeed, an important current goal of Outward Bound, Inc. is adoption of the model in public education (Bacon, 1988). A wide range of other agencies has also found the Outward Bound model especially useful with a variety of special populations. Adventure Alternatives in Human Services, the largest special interest group in the Association for Experiential Education, represents the interests of professional outdoor leaders working largely with youth at risk or adjudicated youth. More recently, women's programs, programs for the physically challenged, and especially executive challenge programs for corporate managers have become popular.

Drawing from all the traditions of professional guiding, camping and Outward Bound, another robust approach to outdoor leadership is the outdoor school. The foremost American example is the National Outdoor Leadership School which provides wilderness skills and leadership instruction with an emphasis on environmental awareness. Many climbing schools such as the American Alpine Institute in Bellingham, WA, focus on skills instruction only. Several of the finest, including the Nantahala Outdoor Center in North Carolina and the Rocky Mountain Outdoor Center in Colorado, have grown out of the outfitting and guiding industry, but focus on skill instruction to enhance the quality of the client's experience. Others, such as the National Audubon Expedition Institute have employed adventure challenge experiences as vehicles to enhance environmental education. Overall, outdoor schools have most closely followed in the philosophical footsteps of such early 20th century outdoor educators as L. B. Sharp and Julian Smith.

Another current approach to outdoor leadership growing out of the Outward Bound movement is facility-based adventure education. Karl Rohnke traces the uses of ropes and initiatives courses back to 19th century European military training (Rohnke, 1989), but their current popularity began with the Colorado Outward Bound School in 1963. In 1972,

Project Adventure, Inc. was awarded National Demonstrator status by the U.S. Office of Education and was funded to promote the use of ropes courses in public school physical education programs. Currently there are approximately 2000-3000 challenge ropes courses in the United States alone (Webster, 1989), constructed in trees, on telephone poles, in gymnasiums, over swimming pools and any number of innovative locations. The goals typically include building self-concept, communication and social skills, conflict resolution skills, and decision-making ability. Current applications are similar to uses of the Outward Bound model: public school physical education, leadership training, psychiatric settings, executive effectiveness programs, and camps.

Finally, adventure programs have come into their own in the last decade as an adjunct to religious education. Drawing on a long tradition of church camping, Christian religious educators, especially, have adopted portions of the Outward Bound model and many common outdoor adventure activities as vehicles to teach spirituality. Some denominations offer outdoor experiences to units of the denomination only, while others offer their programs to a broad range of clients seeking spiritual experiences in wilderness settings. Noteworthy examples include Jerry Fallwell's Liberty Expeditions in Virginia and the Navigators' Eagle Lake Camp in Colorado (a modified Outward Bound Program).

Impediments to Professionalization

Even from this brief summary of six traditions in outdoor leadership, it is easy to see why we do not move more quickly toward a unified profession. We are like six proverbial blind men feeling an elephant: Most of us are not aware of the activities in other segments of the industry. We equate the term outdoor leader with professional guides, professional ski instructors, Outward Bound instructors, American Camping Association certified tripcrafter instructors, or whatever sanctioning system we happen to be familiar with.

More specifically, I believe there are five basic reasons for the failure of the outdoor leadership profession to coalesce: (a) variations in the hard skills required, (b) disparity in program goals, (c) failure of a common vision in outdoor recreation, (d) failure of professional leaders to provide philisophical or theoretical underpinnings, and (e) relative success of each segment of the industry independently. First, at the surface it appears that the differences in skill required to perform in various adventure activities are so great that there is little commonality across activities. While this may be somewhat true at the psychomotor level, there are other levels. For example, I recently completed an American Canoe Association whitewater kayak instructor's course. We were required to demonstrate competencies in paddling but also competencies in teaching and trip management. These latter categories included skills in communication, participant assessment, activity sequencing, equipment selection and maintenance, reconnaissance and scouting, emergency management, and rescue. Much of the material I learned in that course will help me organize my instructional activities in ski mountaineering, backpacking, and climbing.

Secondly, at the surface it also appears that the disparity in program goals is so great that many of us have little in common. The adventure therapist in an Outward Bound model treatment program may view the role of a commercial raft guide as trivial. The extended wilderness program instructor may look down her nose at the camp ropes course instructor. In fact, a considerable body of research literature already documents strong commonalities across types of adventure experiences (Ewert, 1989). The fundamental components of many adventure experiences are the same: a clear challenge, forcing self reliance and performance; a sense of understanding and satisfaction when the challenge is met; a compelling interdependency of party members; an appreciation and humility about the natural environment (Miles, 1978).

Thirdly, the benefits of outdoor adventure experiences cross so many boundaries that most professionals fail to conceptualize the entire vision. As we focus on spiritual growth, technical skills instruction, or environmental awareness, we come to see programs emphasizing other benefits as foreign. In doing this we separate ourselves from potential colleagues. Exacerbating this problem has been a general lack of conceptual leadership from scholars and theoreticians in the field (with some notable exceptions, of course).

Finally, each segment of the outdoor adventure education industry has achieved some semblance of success without strong alliances with other approaches. The long-standing outfitting and camping industries have consistently found new niches to permit slow but steady growth. Outward Bound model programs and the outdoor schools serve more restricted markets but have in many instances shown more dramatic growth curves over the last decade. Facility-based adventure is currently undergoing a major period of expansion and professionalization, evidenced by annual ropes course builders' *summit conferences* to enhance professionalism and standardization. Each of the industry segments has become more concerned with its own proprietary standards of operation, risk management, marketing, and staff development with shrinking concern for the bigger picture.

A Potential Solution

For me to suggest in the Introduction that I might offer a potential solution to this situation was partially a lie. For a solution to even be sought requires that the situation be viewed as problematic. I am not sure many outdoor leaders see the crystallization of a profession of outdoor leadership as a problem.

I believe there are several important benefits to be realized by a clearer identification with the broader field. First, I believe a greater public awareness of the professional competencies of outdoor leaders can be cultivated in a broad range of external publics. Corporate groups now understand the power of well-facilitated ropes courses in management training and are paying commensurately. Other segments of our generally poorly paid industry stand to benefit from an enhanced public image as well.

Secondly, much of outdoor adventure education still suffers liability insurance problems. A better information network, better standardization, and a clear identification with a recognized human service profession would alleviate this problem considerably.

Finally, a clearer professional image would assist the profession in influencing public-policy decisions which impact our work. An example is the determination of minimum stream flows for whitewater rivers managed by federal and state agencies. If recreational use priorities were advocated not only by American Rivers and the Western River Guides Association, but also by the Association for Experiential Education, Christian Camping International, and others, a greater awareness of the values involved could be cultivated.

Part of a solution to our problem of fragmentation is to allow America's universities to play a much larger role in professional development than they are now playing in teaching, research, and service. Bachelor graduates of degree tracks in outdoor leadership can come to represent the standard minimum competency levels for entry level professionals. Coursework in these programs can include risk management, and insurance; group dynamics, processing, and leadership; wilderness Emergency Medical Technician training; ethics in experiential education and backcountry conservation; marketing and finance. A Wilderness Education Association national standard certification course would play a natural role, as it emphasizes the development of judgment from experience in field outdoor leadership. Hard skills and teaching skills can be cultivated in climbing, paddling, mountaineering, ropes course leadership, etc. In short, degreed outdoor leaders can contribute much broader professional perspectives to all segments of the industry if we will invest in their preparation and employment.

The other two potential service areas normally provided to the professions by universities (research and service) are also equally atrophied in outdoor leadership. As an industry, we do not generally welcome research or benefit much by it. We tend to view research and technology transfer as antithetical to the values of wilderness life that we hold dear. But if we are to achieve the levels of respectability and influence in society that many of us aspire to, we must systematically examine our own activities and make improvements based on our self-examinations.

Outdoor professionals have never been much good at agreeing on organized approaches for professional development (or organized approaches to anything else)! But if we can agree that professionalism is a priority, I believe that universities can and must play a central role in our maturation.

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